

OAKLAND TRIBUNE (CA)
20 October 1980

The left is leery of a new militarism

By Raul Ramirez
Tribune Staff Writer

BERKELEY — A "hysterical" reaction to the events in Iran and Afghanistan is helping thrust the United States into a dangerous era of militarism and new secret agency excesses, Rep. Ronald Dellums warned Sunday.

Dellums, warmly greeted by more than 300 persons at the closing session of a Berkeley symposium on the McCarthy era, was among a score of civil rights and leftist political activists focusing on what they see as repressive tendencies at all levels of the U.S. government.

"Congress is now involved in loosening up the limitations in intelligence agencies which will bring a resumption of a myriad illegal and immoral activities that marked the '70s and the '60s," Dellums told the closing panel of the symposium sponsored by the Micklejohn Civil Liberties Institute at Finnish Hall.

The Berkeley congressman pointed at pending legislation slated for key votes when the lame duck Congress resumes its session Nov. 12, including:

- The CIA-backed "names of agents" bill, which would make it a crime punishable by up to 10 years in prison and a \$50,000 fine to disclose the names of U.S. intelligence operatives abroad.

- A revamping of the U.S. Criminal Code which, among its many provisions disturbing to civil libertarians, would curtail existing protections for labor strike activities, increase penalties for violations of the Selective Service Act and make easier prosecution of persons revealing certain government secrets.

Instead of removing safeguards adopted on the face of the agencies' illegal acts, Congress should be taking an even closer look, Dellums said.

Membership in a House committee that probed allegations of illegal activities by the FBI and CIA was both the most "exciting" and "frightening experience of my adult life," Dellums said.

The excitement, he said, came from the opportunity to pose crucial, seldom-asked questions to the architects of U.S. secret policies.

The fear, he said, came from realizing that "this country has developed technology to penetrate privacy anywhere, any place, any time it chooses to do so."

The committee's observations have been largely ignored by Congress as it moves to lift restrictions on covert CIA activity abroad and to broaden the president's power

"This is the moment we're in," Dellums said. "This is hysteria."

Dellums' bleak assessment was echoed by Frank Wilkinson, whose work in the National Committee Against Repressive Legislation was key in causing the dismantling of the now-infamous House Un-American Activities Committee, a prime tool in the harassment of U.S. leftists for decades.

Noting that even at the height of the McCarthy era besieged political activists could sometimes obtain judicial relief, Wilkinson said that avenue of redress is disappearing.

"We now have coordinated oppression," Wilkinson said. "We no longer have checks and balances. The Burger court itself is on a collision course with the Bill of Rights."

Other panelists said political and racial oppression have historically gone hand in

hand in the United States.

Anne Braden, famed civil rights organizer in the South, noted that long before the McCarthy era and the Cold War, the Communist label was used to seek to discredit civil rights workers.

The impact of red-baiting was particularly significant among whites, she said.

"It was pretty hard to convince a black person that this movement was a communist plot," she said. "They knew better. (But), if it had not been for that fear atmosphere of communism the civil rights movement would have been much more a movement of black and white together."

Bert Corona, longtime Los Angeles area Hispanic leader and organizer, said a weapon used to combat political and labor organization among Hispanics has been immigration laws.

Two key Hispanic organizations — the National Congress of Spanish Speaking People and the Mexican American National Association — were decimated by quick deportations of their members, Corona said.

Rick Herbert, who said he is active in the National Lawyers Guild defense of Iranian students faced with immigration sanctions here since last December, emphasized that "this sort of racist hysteria is still with us."

Noting visible resurgence of Klu Klux Klan and Nazi activity in the U.S., the panelists pondered its significance.

Racial hostilities, several observed, could well be the instrument to advance political oppression, as hostility towards Jews was in Hitler Germany's march towards Nazi supremacy.